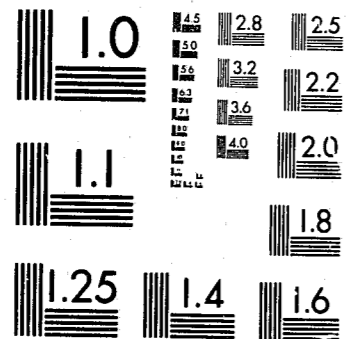


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United States Department of Justice  
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2/27/81

74640

THE GENERAL EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM:  
AN ALTERNATIVE FOR THE DELINQUENT WITH  
LEARNING DISABILITIES

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Supported by Grant Numbers 76-JN-99-0021 and 78-JN-AX-0022 from the National Institute for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U. S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this paper are those of the authors and do not represent the official position or policies of the U. S. Department of Justice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author expresses appreciation to the following who contributed many hours developing, implementing and conducting the General Educational Development program as an alternative plan for the juveniles participating in the ACLD-R&D study:

Jamia Jacobsen  
Indianapolis Site Program Director

Loretta Weingel-Fidel  
Phoenix Site Program Director

Belton Wilder  
Baltimore Site Program Director

Marjorie Chance  
LD Specialist  
Indianapolis Site

THE GENERAL EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM:  
AN ALTERNATIVE FOR THE DELINQUENT WITH  
LEARNING DISABILITIES

During the past several years, increasing attention has been paid to the possibility of an empirical relationship between specific learning disabilities (LD) and juvenile delinquency. In response to this interest, the National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, commissioned a study by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to summarize the available data and make policy recommendations.

The AIR report (Murray, 1976) concluded that the available evidence on a link between LD and juvenile delinquency was inconclusive at best; nevertheless, the topic was deemed worthy of further, more systematic exploration. The report recommended that carefully controlled research be conducted to determine the prevalence of LD among juvenile offenders and officially non-delinquent youth. The report also recommended the conduct of a development project to assess the effects of diagnosing and treating LD among juvenile delinquents.

In light of these conclusions, the National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, in October 1976,

funded two organizations to conduct a project based on the AIR recommendations. The grant recipients were the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (ACLD) and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). ACLD was responsible for the development component; NCSC was the grantee for the research component. NCSC contracted with Educational Testing Service to conduct a portion of the research program.

The project had three major components:

1. A study of the prevalence of LD among samples of officially nondelinquent adolescents and adjudicated juvenile delinquents in several parts of the country.<sup>1</sup>
2. A research and development effort in which there was a remediation program implemented and conducted with groups of LD delinquents located at the same sites as the prevalence study.<sup>2</sup>
3. An evaluation of the remediation program to determine the effectiveness of an academic treatment model on the sample population.

This paper describes the General Educational Development program within the context of the ACLD-R&D Project's remediation design and program implementation.

The Remediation Design and Program Implementation

The remediation program was conducted in Baltimore, Maryland; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Phoenix, Arizona. The sample

population was drawn from the adjudicated delinquents identified as LD in the prevalence study. Remediation was scheduled to take place for a minimum of one school year and a maximum of two school years.

The program was based on an academic treatment model rather than either behavioral or medical models. This type of approach focused on academic task processes. Remedial methods treated the school subjects directly and were based on analysis of errors within the school task. Functional level tasks were included also. Within this design, the objectives were to remediate deficits in academic skill areas and to provide continued learning in spite of the juveniles' functioning at low skill levels.

A Program Director with a team of Learning Disability Specialists, certified in Special Education, conducted the remediation program at each site. The conduct of remediation took place in any setting where the student was available during the course of the day. Consequently, the remediation setting varied from within a public school to "on-the-job-at-lunch-time" sessions, as well as libraries, correctional facilities, detention centers, city jails and the students' homes. As a rule, the LD Specialists traveled by car to meet with their caseload on an individual basis. Each Specialist had a caseload of approximately ten students; remediation sessions varied from one to four one-

hour sessions per week throughout a twelve-month period with each juvenile.

The remediation program commenced after the students and their locations had been identified. Once the juveniles had been assigned to receive remediation, the following sequence of tasks took place:

1. Review of psychological diagnostic information. Information transmitted to the Learning Disability Specialist which included achievement testing results and a general psychological test.
2. Locating, gaining access to and the initial contact with the juvenile.
3. Administration of additional formal and informal tests.
4. Writing of formal remediation prescriptions.
5. Planning and scheduling.
6. Development of lesson plans and identification of instructional materials.
7. On-going remediation and data collecting.

It was found a number of the sample population in the community were school drop-outs with little interest in returning to any form of academics. This situation presented a challenge to the Specialists when writing prescriptive educational

plans (lesson plans). After consultation with administrative project staff, the decision was to present an optional program as an alternative to those not attending school. The option was to prepare for the test to obtain a High School Equivalency Diploma through the General Educational Development (G.E.D.). This option was clearly within the developmental design as the Project's academic treatment model and its objectives were used. It is this G.E.D. program toward which the remainder of the paper directs itself.

#### The General Educational Development Program

The Project's G.E.D. design adjusted the quality as well as the quantity of the course of study. The settings and the atmosphere of the program were kept informal. The program was personalized and directed toward the students' academic needs. It was necessary within the framework of the program that:

1. the instructors exercise patience and understanding;
2. the program be related to the student's interests, hobbies, sports, problems, etc.
3. the instructors have a thorough understanding and knowledge of the dynamics of learning with all the complexities of the student's learning styles and personalities.

4. the Specialists have a complete grasp of the subject matter and its relationship to the complexities of the student's learning styles and personalities.

The G.E.D. program consists of six parts:

1. Correctness and Effectiveness of Expression
  - a. The Diagnostic Test
  - b. Grammar and Usage
  - c. Common Errors in Sentence Structure
  - d. Style and Clarity
  - e. Choosing the Right Word
  - f. Punctuation
  - g. Capitalization
  - h. Pronunciation
  - i. Review Exercises
  - j. The Simulated Test
2. Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Skills
  - a. The Main Idea of Passage
  - b. Unfamiliar Words
  - c. Vocabulary
3. Interpretation of Reading Materials in the Social Studies
  - a. The Diagnostic Test
  - b. Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Skills
  - c. Reading Passage in the Social Skills
  - d. Charts, Graphs and Maps
  - e. The Simulated Test
4. Interpretation of Reading Materials in the Natural Sciences
  - a. The Diagnostic Test
  - b. Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Skills
  - c. Reading Passages in the Natural Sciences
  - d. The Simulated Test

5. Interpretation of Literary Materials

- a. The Diagnostic Test
- b. Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Skills
- c. Reading Prose
- d. Reading Poetry
- e. Reading Drama
- f. The Glossary
- g. The Simulated Test

6. General Mathematical Ability

- a. The Diagnostic Test
- b. Fractions
- c. Decimal Fractions
- d. Percentage
- e. Graphs
- f. Properties of Numbers
- g. Signed Numbers
- h. Algebra
- i. Monomials and Polynomials
- j. Geometry
- k. Modern Mathematics
- l. Mathematics Tests
- m. The Simulated Test

The primary objective for those juveniles involved in a G.E.D. program is the preparation for taking tests which would qualify them for a High School Equivalency diploma. The test attempts to measure the learning stressed in high school classrooms without placing any emphasis on the attitudes and understanding developed in the extracurricular areas. Good health, physical fitness, occupational aptitudes and skills are not measured directly or indirectly.

The Project's G.E.D. program, therefore, focused on academic skills and knowledge. This pragmatic course of study proved motiva-

tional for those youths participating in the Project's remediation program who were school drop-outs. Thus, a program could be planned keeping within the framework of the Project's academic treatment model. In fact, after the Project's remediation phase was finished, several incarcerated students elected to continue this alternative plan of education.

It is hypothesized by many educators that one of the basic ingredients of academic achievement is motivation. For the juvenile to learn he must be motivated to set goals and objectives, achieve the aims, and take advantage of the opportunities which are available.

Alternative educational programs are developed to be more motivational for students who have not responded to traditional academic methods. Many learning disability adolescents are in this category. If the student who is experiencing educational difficulties along with social problems can see a reason for learning and have academic opportunities which are more appealing, it would be surmised that society would have more productive adults.

With this in mind, an alternative educational program such as the G.E.D. provides options and may better answer the academic needs of this type of juvenile. The fact that the youth believes he is learning and gaining skills in the academic areas proving that he can achieve is itself an incentive.

The G.E.D. as an alternative is one way to help motivate the LD juvenile into a more positive learning pattern. The program can offer classroom type instruction as well as individual self-motivated study. The G.E.D. class can be one in which students help each other. The teacher then becomes a helper, not someone in authority making judgments. In this program the LD juvenile can analyze and judge his individual progress, which instills within the youth a sense of self-accomplishment.

Historically, the G.E.D. has been a successful resource program for servicemen, job placements, and academic training. It is a program which is of great value for those unable to learn in a traditional oriented school setting. In sum, the experience of the ACLD-R&D Project suggests that the G.E.D. is an effective method to improve academic performance for a portion of the juvenile population.

#### Footnotes

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**END**